

THE VOICE OF THE REED

By

DUVVURU RAMI REDDY

*Translated by the author from
his original Telugu poems*

**Printed with the
financial assistance of
Gunupati Venkata Ramana Reddy Trust**

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To
James H. Cousins
and
C. R. Reddy

Publisher's Note

We are very glad to bring out a second edition of the late Duvvuri Rami Reddy's English rendering of some of his Telugu poems published under the title "Voice of the Reed", in the year 1924. In his life time, Rami Reddy wanted to get it printed again. But for some reason the second edition did not see the light of day. So a second edition of the book has been a desideratum for over half a century

On 20th June in 1984 a trust under the name "Duvvuru Rami Reddy Vignana Samithi" was formed with the blessings of Dr. Bezawada Gopala Reddy garu to perpetuate the memory of this great poet by celebrating the birth anniversary every year and also arranging to reprint as far as possible such of his popular works as had become unobtainable. This Trust was sponsored by the R.L. Reddy Trust of Nellore and supported by donations from some lovers of literature. It was decided to honour a great literary man and a scientist alternately on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the poet.

This edition has been possible with the financial aid of Sri Gunupati Venkata Ramana Reddy Trust, Nellore. We thank Sri Gunupati Harischandra Reddy who came forward to arrange financial assistance from the trust. In this connection we thank Sri Gunupati Audi Sessa Reddy, Sri J. K. Reddy and Sri Katam Reddy Subba Reddy also for their interest in the publication of the book.

We are very much indebted to Dr. Bezawada Gopala Reddy garu who was in the first place the motive force for the whole enterprise and who kindly contributed a fitting prefatory note (A Tribute) to this edition.

We express our deep gratitude to Smt. Duvvuru Satyavatamma, wife of late Duvvuri Venugopala Reddy (son of the poet) and Duvvuri Venkata Rama Mohan, son of Late D. Venugopala Reddy for making over the rights of publishing the "VOICE OF THE REED" to Duvvuru Rami Reddy Vignana Samithi, Nellore. We also thank Dr. Vemareddi Prabhakar Reddy (son-in-law of late D. Venugopala Reddy) for his valuable help in this matter.

We are grateful to Sri K. V. Ramana Reddy formerly lecturer, Jawahar Bharati, Kavali, a recognised authority on Duvvuri Rami Reddy and his works for kindly placing before us the poet's typed manuscript of the book when we were not able to secure a printed copy of the first edition in order to send it to the press. However a copy of the book was fortunately obtained in time from Smt. T. Anasuyamma and we are thankful to her. We must also express our thanks to Sri K V Ramana Reddy for his very valuable suggestions regarding the Publication and supplying a short autobiographical sketch of the poet.

We shall be failing in our duty if we do not

mention the pains taken by “ VAMSEE KRISHNA PRINTERS ”Nellore in making this edition beautiful and satisfying. We also thank Sri Tunga Raja Gopala Reddy, Editor of the Telugu Weekly, “ LAWYER ’ for the help he has rendered to get the book printed in time. We thank also Sri Vedam Venkata Raman, Lecturer in English, V. R. College, Nellore for his advise and Sri Rajee for the excellent and artistic Cover design.

Duvvuru Rami Reddy
Vignana Samithi
Nellore



A TRIBUTE

Sri Duvvuru Rami Reddy is one of the important Telugu poets of modern renaissance in Telugu literature. Under the influence of the English poets and after Gurudev Tagore winning the Nobel Prize in 1913, there was a new awakening in Telugu literary consciousness.

Rami Reddy is a self-made man. He had no formal education as such but he took interest in many fields of activity from poetics to radio building, architecture etc. He studied persian all by himself to render Omar khayyam into an excellent Telugu kavyam 'Panasala'. But his speciality is the description of rural scenes of the life of agriculturists. He is basically a pastoral poet and he is the pioneer in describing a ryot's life in a rural setting. If Jashuva is the voice of untouchables, Rami Reddy became the voice of a rural agriculturist.

I am happy Duvvuru Rami Reddy Vignana Samithi of Nellore is commemorating the services of the Poet and also the scientist in him. They are honouring a pandit and a scientist alternatively.

Rami Reddy rendered his own selection of his Telugu poems into English and dedicated it to Dr. James Cousins and to Dr. C. R. Reddy. Both of them encouraged him as a Telugu Poet and his own translator. The Vignana Samithi is now bringing out

a re-edition of his “ VOICE OF THE REED” published in the year 1924.

Gunupati Venkata Ramana Reddy Trust has come forward to undertake the printing of this re-print and I offer my felicitations to the G.V.Ramana Reddy Trust for their kind gesture. G.V. Ramana Reddy was senior to me in the high School and took great interest in literature and music and the Trust formed by his sons in the name of their father will , I am sure continue to encourage literature and arts .

I am thankful to the Vignana Samithi for giving me this opportunity to pen these few lines for the second edition of “ VOICE OF THE REED ” .

B. Gopala Reddy

Santhiniketan

Nellore - 3

1—10—1986

Akshaya Naraka Chaturdasi

FOREWORD

To the First Edition

THE poems in this small volume are free translations made by the author from his Telugu originals, with some slight revision by myself. They have the directness of utterance, the thrilling crystalline beauty that come from the expression of the heart when it is shaped by a mind working freely through its own tradition and speech. As here presented in English, though only claiming to be prose translations, they may stand with honour among the best free verse of today. Certain of the poems have the rhythmic structure which belongs to literary architecture. They have also the element of symbolism which is the natural expression of the Indian vision that sees through the details of life to its spiritual centre; but the symbolism is vital and immediate; it is no cold likening of this to that. All through the poems there is that touch of intimacy with the details of Indian life, thought, feeling, and environment, which give the stamp of authenticity where they are familiar, and the charm of originality where unfamiliar. Mr. Rami Reddy, though still in his twenties, has published several volumes of verse in his native tongue, and received recognition from vernacular learned bodies. The present translation will, I hope find him many readers in the other linguistic areas of India, and also carry some indication of modern Indian literature to lovers of the best things in song in other parts of the world.

James H. Cousins.

An Auto-biographical Sketch of the Poet

I was born in the year 1895, November 9th, Saturday morning at about 6-30 at Gudur and was brought up at Pemmareddy palem. My scholastic education was very limited. I may be called a product of my home University. My Profession is cultivation. My aptitude is for sciences and mechanical engineering. I practised painting and clay modelling for some time before I gave myself to poetry. I became a poet by a trivial accident in my life when I was 19. That is the reason why I always suspect that poetry may leave me without a moment's notice as easily as it came to me.

My intense productive period started in 1916 and lasted for 7 years. During this period I produced a book in every rainy season. Almost all my works were written in this period except Panasala and other later productions. Afterwards the interval gradually expanded itself from months to years.

In 1917 (Sir) C. R. Reddy presented me with a gold medal as the president of the Peddy Conference at Nellore. In 1918 I got the first prize of 500 Rupees for my "Vanakumari" in the literary competition held by the maharaj of Vijayanagar and I was given the prize in a special Darbar called for that purpose.

I translated my stray Telugu poems into English free verse under the name "Voice of the Reed" and it was well-received by Indian, English and American press. Dr. James H. Cousins, D. Litt; recited my English poems in his world tour in many important centres of India, Japan, America, England and he told me that they were well appreciated. The "Forward" of Calcutta commenting on one of his Calcutta lectures wrote in conclusion saying that

“in our Ravindranath, in Harindranath, Sarojini and in young Rami Reddy was burning a light of the spirit which sent an appeal in other parts of the world to release the true poet within “

I met Dr. Cousins at Adayar after his world tour. He surprised me by saying “Rami Reddy, don't you think it wonderful that an Irish poet should deliver lectures on Indian vernacular poetry in England and an American professor sojourning near Pyramids should feel miserable for want of a copy of your “Voice of the Reed ” Thinking he might not reach you I sent him a spare copy.”

Three of my poems were included in the British Empire Edition of English Poetry. Perhaps that was the first time that a Telugu poet was honoured by foreign compilers.

Dr. James H. Cousins has devoted one Chapter “Three Vernacularpoets of India” in his work Samadar-sana. The three poets are Sir Mohamed Icbal, myself and Puran Singh. He appreciated my free verse form, structure, the original ideas contained and wrote that “They are ages above than what is produced in America.”

The “Voice of the Reed” was out of print some ten years ago and my Laziness (for which I am notorious) was responsible for not reprinting it. Even my personal copy was taken by a friend and he never chose to return it. A very inconvenient way of appreciating poetry! I have studied Persian, Bengali and French languages.

(Extract from the letter written by the poet to Sri Tallavajjula Sivasankara Sastri)

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Heart's Solace

O Cow-herd Prince of Brindavan !

O Celestial Fluter !

Fill the cup of my frail life

With the wine of Thy song

That I may melt into liquid music,

And flow into Eternity.

O poet of the Universal Poem !

Touch the camphor of my heart

With the spark of Divine Wisdom

That I may burn at Thy lotus feet

Wafting perfume into the air.

O Light of the Worlds !

Show to my inner vision

Thy Divine Radiance

That my tears of joy may bloom

Into flowers for Thy worship.

The Traveller

In the dead of night, O lady,
Why do you Touch the *Veena*,
And attune the strings to heart-Melting
 Melodies,
Only to stop so soon ?

To my lips you have brought
A cup full of sparkling wine.
But, alas ! at the moment of tasting,
Your hand withholds it.

I tasted a mere drop of its contents :
And in mad pursuit after that elusive joy
My heart wanders in vain !

The owl, a sentinel of midnight, screams ,
Dark clouds brood over the sky ;
The myriad stars have vanished in gloom ;
Shower after shower drenches the forest lands ;
In the dark wilderness I have missed my way
And wander alone and homeless.
Do not put out the light, O lady !

That burns perfumed oil in our window.
Until my day's weariness is lost
In the refreshing embrace of golden dreams.
I wish to take my night's repose
Under your benevolent roof.

Clouds and My Childhood

O Sweet reminiscences of my childhood days !

You come riding on the soft winter clouds,
Whispering in my ears through the music of rain-drops
The story of our waining friendship.

Every winter I wish I were a boy
To dam the rain-streamlets in the streets,
And to play and saunter in the *Jil Jil* showers !

O drifting clouds !

Do you yet remember my face,
That Childish face wreathed in innocent smiles ?
Oh ! do you yet remember my wistful eyes,
Those eyes that feasted on you in joyous wonderment ?
Oh ! have you forgotten my little hands.
Those lovely little hands that I vainly lifted to catch
your sun-laced fringes ?

Am I the same child ? Alas ! no
I have grown up. I am twenty-six winters old.

O heavenly wanderers !

What silent disciplines, What unknown charities,
Did you perform in your previous births
To have been born as clouds in perpetual childhood ?
When I was a child you were children too;
But all these winters have wrought no change in you,

While on my brows time leaves its deep footprints
When I look at you, my heart forgets its age !
Oh ! had it not been for prying eyes,
And ever vibrant scandalous tongues,
I would have played in your showers
As a merry child of bygone days.

The Clouds (In reply)

O poet friend ! do not grieve at your lot.
What if your body reclines quietly at home ;
Is not your heart hugged in our embrace,
As of old in innocent joy ?
Time may plough furrows on your brow,
But, Oh ! your heart is as young as ourselves
Good bye, friend, we drift away.

Poet and Sanyasin

Sanyasin (Aside)

Who is it that descends from heaven,
Like a Cloud messenger to the seashore
Robed in the golden hues of evening ?

(Aloud)

Who are you who come down from above,
Like a winged magic flute, to human habitation ?

Poet

O Sanyasin,
I am a native artist of dreamland
But, how is it that you look like one
Who floats shell-boats for pleasure.
And sheds tears when they are stranded ?

Sanyasin

O citizen of dreamland !
Like a pearl-fisher, often I desire to hoist sail
And steer My boat across the seas.
I thought I would cast my net,
And return home with the treasures of the deep.
But, alas ! when I face the foaming fury
 of the storm-beaten waves,
My heart sinks in despair ;
And I moor the boat lest it should be wrecked.
With a sigh of seeming satisfaction,

I now idle my time away,
Floating shell-boats near the shore.
Ah ! my empty heart !
Well, is it your profession to play on the flute ?

Poet

For the ethereal travellers
I enchain the planetary worlds
With beautiful rainbow bridges.
I weave into wreaths of poetry
' The churning of the ocean of milk. '
And play my flute ever and anon
To soften the tones of the boisterous sea
In to the music of heavenly nymphs.

Sanyasin

O enchanter !
What wild things you talk !
You have bewitched me with your magic.
In one hand you hold a cup of celestial wine ,
And in the other the bitterest venom !

Poet

O Sanyasin ! that is the secret of life !
Sweetness and bitterness are its light and shade ;
They are the rose and leaf on one stem.
If you doubt the strength of your boat,
Why do you think of ploughing the main ?

If your heart shrinks to meet the mad
 revelry of the drunken waves,
Why should you yearn for the pearls of the seas?
O childish man!
In vain you attempt to fly away
From your own shadow.

Sanyasin

O Poet ! I am won to your side.
See, yonder, the planks of my broken boat;
Set them right for my voyage:
Unfurl the sails and lend me your oars.



Revelation

In the flowers that bloom in the morning
And in the flowers that loosen their petals in the evening
I read, as in a poem,
The secret Workings of Nature.

The countless tongues of the restless ocean
Din into my ears the story of creation,
Which to others is a sealed mystery.

The deep stillness of the night as my preceptor,
I read the infiniteness of the universe
From the starry script
Written on the blue slate of the sky.

On the eastern shores,
When the sunbeams marry the golden sands,
Nature opens before me
The book of her heart.

Tears of Flowers

“Kamala ! art thou yet asleep ?

The wealthy Dawn in her exuberance

Lavishes gold on our cottage walls.

Hurry to the garden to gather flowers.

Father returns home from the bathing pool

To finish his morning worship.”

Kamala, hearing what her mother said

Hurried through her toilet;

Walked around her household Deity, Brinda,

And hastened to the garden with a flower-basket,

While the dew-laden grass washed her feet.

Her lips quivered with the biting cold ;

She drew her mantle thickly over her shoulders;

For the morning was chill with the mountain wind.

Kamala stepped into the garden to pluck flowers.

Lo ! what did she behold ?

The golden dew,

Like the crystal beads of a broken rosary,

Glided from the petals

Of the opening flowers !

She stood on the spot
In calm wondering mood ;
And her heart melted into tears.
‘Kamala, come here ! ’
She made no response,
For she was all joy and rapture
“When the tears flow down the petals,
How can I pluck these tender flowers ?
In the morning breeze when the flowers quiver,
I fancy that Nature laughs through them.
O cruel ! How can I destroy these flower babes
Who in festive glee flutter and bask,
In the warm sunshine.
It cuts my heart to pluck a flower
And deprive Nature of her art’s display.
My father strangles beauty to worship God.
Oh ! I shall beg him to please the Lord
With the lotus offering of his heart ! ”
So musing, she returned to the cottage,
With the empty flower-basket in her hand.



Love's Call

O my sweetheart

The charming breeze from the south
Comes laden with the fragrance of flowers
Newly blossomed in the moonlit night
Under the caress of the silent dew,
And greets us at the window.

A pair of koils in the adjacent grove
Warble heart-ravishing notes,
And stir the bosom of the calm midnight
Which sleeps like a rippleless lake.

Shall we go to the mountain retreats
Fondled by the rivulet showers,
Under the silky moonlit sky ?
Now the poet communes with Nature,
Now the golden dreams hover over the slumbering
world ;

Now is the time to whisper my secret heart,
When the birds entwine their lovely necks
And sleep through the quiet hours in their nests.

Shall we go now my darling,
To the sands of the mountain rill ?
On the banks of that musical stream
Shall I wash the bashful bloom
Of thy warm cheeks
With the wine of my kisses ?
O my love ! wilt thou come ?

A Mystic Poet

O mystic poet !

You always soar
In the deep blue sky
Of the inner realm,
And elude my grasp.

Like a blown flower
Unheard of and unknown,
Shedding fragrance
In a woodland bower,
You live alone
In a forest cottage,
Beyond the ken of busy life.
But your grand creations
Invite the world's attention
Like a winter rainbow.

As the songs of *Apsarasas*
To the portals of Paradise,
Human hearts raise
Your poem-balloon.
To the summits of imagination
It carries my soul.

In that dreamland,
The daughters of moonbeams,

Nymphs of charming beauty,
Sit by my side,
Helping me with a crystal goblet
Overflowing with ruby wine.
To my content, the contents I drain;
My eyelids hang half-way down.
Life's miserable cares
Are drowned in the wine-cup

O, do not wake me up
From this Elysian bliss,
Even should the planets
Tumble on me in pieces.
Let me for all time
Swim in the sea of happiness.
O jewel of the poets !
What gift can I offer
In exchange for your Poem ?
Miser's gold cannot set
A price on its heavenly brow.
With a handful of tears
I approach you
And beseech acceptance.

Radha Expectant

I have bathed in cooling rose-water,
And perfumed my hair with amber incense.
On my forehead I have put the beauty-spot.
I have painted my eyes with *Collyrium*,
Decked my tresses with *Garanta* wreaths,
And smeared my bosom with sandal paste.
In my bedroom I sprinkled camphor dust,
And scattered petals on the couch.
I wait at the doorstep.
Alas ! my beloved still delays his coming.
Watching his path in vain,
My heart burns with impatience ;
My eyes are dim with rolling tears.
I wait at the doorstep.
Alas ! my lover still delays his coming.
The last vestige of the sunset lingers,
Birds return to their nests.
Cows wend their way to the stalls.
Songs of the flute thrill the twilight gloom.
Koils carol in the mango grove.
Dusk thickens over the sky.
Starry pendants hang in space.
I wait at the doorstep.
Alas ! Sree Krishna still delays his coming.
The camphor candle burnt to its socket.

The petals on the couch withered.
The sandal paste on my bosom dried into powder.
Drowsiness conquered my eyes.
Gazing at the stars wending westward,
I fell asleep at the doorstep.
Next morning, the Sun, the Lotus-Friend,
Shone with his thousand torches,
As if to unveil my shame.
Churning the curds, I sang the "bee's reproach,"
Implying my proud lover all the time,
While my golden bracelets jingled in chorus.
Lo ! when I looked round,
He was smiling behind my back !
Alas ! he doth not come when I wait for him,
But comes and vanishes like a summer shower
When I little expect him !



Traveller and Child

Child

O weary traveller of the onward way,
With the burden of golden fruit on your back,
Has not your Journey ceased ?

Traveller

Not yet, not yet, my child.
I who bloomed into life like you,
A smiling rose,
And squandered my fragrance at the world's fair,
Now return home, an autumn leaf,
But with the fruit of ages on my back !

On and on

I drag my weary legs
From planet to planet,
And add to the burden a thousandfold.
Until one day when I shall grow rich,
And claim the Universe as my own,
On and on

I drag my weary legs.

Child

Oh ! when shall I be a weary traveller
And walk with the fruit of ages as you ?

Traveller

You are already one my child, already one.

Child

Oh, when shall I grow rich like you
And claim the Universe as my own ?

Traveller

You are already in the way, my child, in the way.

Deception

Traveller

Why are you shedding tears, O lady !

Sitting at the parting ways ?

Tell me whither you wish to go.

I will escort you home before it is dark.

The shadows of the trees lengthen toward the east

The west clutches at the evening gold like a miser.

The village reaper-women hasten homewards

Singing their way from the harvest fields.

The rustling music of the ripened rice

Is heard like a murmur of distant waves

In the ocean of solemn twilight.

Lady

I heard that the Sweetheart of the Gopees

The cowherd Prince, was to pass this way

Since dawn I have been waiting here

To feast my eyes on him.

My eyelids grow weary ;

Yet he comes not this way.

I heard that he rides a huge elephant;

And wears a Jewelled crown and yellow silk.

Traveller

Ah ! you are misled, my lady, misled.
Are you waiting to meet the cowherd prince ?
Did you not behold a boy passing you a while ago
With a bamboo flute in his hand ?
Did you not hear his world-enrapturing song ?
He decks his hair with a peacock plume.
Bee-like curls swarm over his neck.
A wreath of flowers adorns his neck
Strange rhythms are born where his footsteps pass
His shadows enliven the withered creepers.
His flute kindles music even in the soulless reeds !

Lady

Ah ! a faint recollection comes back to me
Like a broken rainbow.
He was a fleeting magical dream !
He eludes my hold O friend, what a deception !

Traveller

Ah ! that is the abysmal mystery, my lady.



Fields in Rain

When the clouds loom over the skies,
I look into my emerald fields
In childish delight !
The passing showers weave a pearly net.
Through it glimmers the day light grey and soft.
The fields beam afresh in living green.
Specks of dust are washed in silvery rain.
The air savours of the grassy scent.
How picturesque are the cranes
Flying against the smoky sky,
Like a garland of emancipated souls
Winging their way heavenward,
Having broken the mortal bonds of form and life.
In every rain drop
A Sweet tongue sings a song
Lo ! the music of the showers
Awakens in my heart
The long-forgotten dreams
Of my playful childhood !



Wooing Poesy

“My beloved Poesy, wilt thou come to me
Under the shadows of the azure sky
Spangled with myriads of stars,
When the moon kisses the Bride of Night
And gilds the fringes of the autumn clouds?
“In the paradise of my dreams
I had a glimpse of thy bewitching face,
And from that day forward
My mind has yearned to behold thee again.
Whenever the Koil sings, the tender leaves flutter,
And the buds blossom, shedding fragrance,
I remember thy name.
The silent music of thy footfall
Gladdens my heart for ever,
As if it were the rhythmic dance of my soul.
I feel shy to beseech thy love.
“On the banks of the golden stream,
Where the sands are carpeted with soft pollen.
I discovered thy rosy footprints.
I kissed and bathed them in tears of joy,
While my heart overflowed with love.
I beg at thy door as my alms
Thy cool and refreshing glances.
My beloved ! wilt thou not take me to thine abode?”
When the young men had uttered these words,
Poesy opened her sweet lips with a gentle smile,

Touched modestly her silken veil,
And with downcast eyes,
Stood rubbing her foot on the ground
Until her anklets jingled into murmurs.
Disguising the feelings of her love-laden heart,
At last she spoke in a sweet voice.
"O flower of youth !
Who art thou to whisper love in mine ears ?
I wander in the meadows of dreamland.
How canst thou join company with me ?
There are many who dance with ecstasy
At my outward beauty and romance.
But very few there are
Who love mine inner soul.
How can young men like thee,
Who live amid the realities of life,
Follow me to the region of stars ?
Why dost thou lift thy frail hand
For unobtainable fruits ?
Go ! my namesakes thou canst find
In thine own world."

When Poesy spoke these words,
The young man looked disappointed, and said :
“So thou belittlest my love !
O ! didst thou but know
How I had passed my days for thy sake
Shouldst thou then think
That I am unworthy of thy love ?
Thou mayst bid me farewell
With a twist of thy brow.
O my beloved Poesy !
Why dost thou kill me with thy charm,
And conceal thy warm heart ?
Why waste the fragrance of my love ?
I am a young man tender-hearted.
Thinkest thou of beguiling me ?
“At break of day when the flowers shed tears of dew,
I too shed tears of joy singing thy praise.
To colour thy silken veil I have tried
To gather the rosy lustre from the evening clouds,
And the essence of moonlight;
But-alas! my attempts have been in vain !
When the Parijatha flowers dropped on the tender grass
Loosened by the touch of the morning breeze.
O, I have madly searched for thy foot prints.

How often have I been ridiculed
When I have tried to string in to a garland
The dew-pearls of a spider's web
To adorn thy superb neck!
At midnight, when Nature slumbered,
I have caught the whispers of thy Veena,
And gazed in wonder into the starry vault.
With tears of joy glistening in my eyes.
“ O do not break into pieces my heart
Which bleeds from the darts of disappointed love.
How canst thou, my beloved poesy !
Possess such a stoney heart ?
I am a frank rustic with rural habits,
And know not the byways of the world.
I was brought in the lap of Mother Nature,
And live by day in the corn-fields.
O, canst thou refuse even such a man's innocent love
When the youth had thus besought her,
Poesy, in response, clasped him to her bosom,
As if the contents of her heart
Overflowed the brim.

(.....)

Parijatha Flowers

O Parijatha, my lovely bloom,
How I wish to bind thee unto my inmost heart
With the silken threads of my childish songs !
You live in mirth from night to dawn,
And drop to earth with the kiss of the morning breeze.
How short and sweet is your life !
No cares of earth weight your brow;
No thought of yesterday or tomorrow.
You pass your time away in dreams,
And die unwept with the rosy dawn.
How short and sweet is your life !



The Chariot Of Independence

The clouds sail over the stormy sky,

With the lightning searchlights.

The showers quench the thirst of the earth.

Through the rainbow arch

The chariot of independence thunders.

The glory of the celestial chariot

Breaks through the clouds like a fiery dawn

Spreading illumination, dispelling gloom,

And infusing new life into the whole creation.

In that chariot an Angel sits;

An incarnation of Dharma;

An embodiment of living Truth;

An emblem of Universal Peace;

The essence of life : and the Heart of the People.

She holds in one hand a cup of blood,

In the other a cup of elixir, and says:

“The thousand horrors and injustices

Passing for Dharma under civilization’s banner

Shall to-day be swept away

From the face of the earth.”

So saying, she mixes the elixir with the blood :
They turn into life's sweetest milk.
The Emperor's sceptre can scarcely command
The chariot's onward course ;
Nor can the deluge of helpless women's tears
Hinder its rampant march.
Cajolery, praise, jugglery and human wailing
Avail not to calm its exuberant triumph ;
It runs and runs with thunderous speed.
But none knows where its destination lies !
Ancient thrones and jewelled crowns,
Revelry halls, and despot's mail
Crumble to dust under its hammering wheels.
Now they are but recollections of the past.

Neither horses nor elephants draw the car :
But only common folk hold the ropes.
Hark ! it flies along the starry path
Crossing over a thousand obstacles.
Blood flows along the chariot's track,
And golden harvests roll in its wake.
The Angel sings the song of peace,
And the starry harps echo the sound.



Leave me to my Life

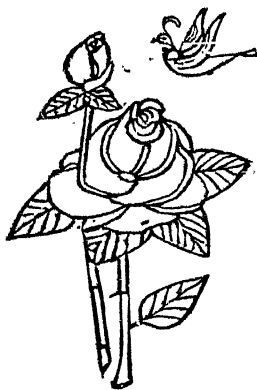
O poet ! why do you build
Mountains out of mole-hills.
And waste your endless sighs
On word-enlivening themes ?
At every step I meet a breathing poem.
At every step I catch the music's rhythm.
At every step I behold a limbed beauty.
All is poetry to my nose and touch ;
All is poetry to my ear and eye.
O poet ! do not fetter the Goddess Muse
With the leaden chains of your verse.
O painter ! do not paint a flower
With the soulless colours of your brush.
Live the life of poetry; that's all
Do not trouble me with your poems. O poet !
And with your pictures, O painter !
Leave me to my life and silence .



Life

As wayfarers in the mid-day sun
Quench their thirst at a wood land spring,
And shelter in the cooling shades
To wend their way after a while;
Even so we, immortal mortals,
Slake our thirst at the fount of life;
Shelter under our own good thoughts,
And drag our legs on to the Golden city,
Which shines on the summits of eternity.
Birth and death are the stepping-stones
In the long winding path of life.
Life is continual as a flowing stream,
And as much eternal as space and time.
Aye ! we go wiser than we came,
And we came yet weiser than we went !
Friends ! despise not earthly life
Its soul-educative spiritual struggle,
Lest you miss the chance to know yourself
Remember, remember and remember thrice

Life is not limited only to this star;
We have to traverse strange distant lands.
Cheer up, fellow traveller! Drain the cup of life
Along with friends, wife and children.
At a moment's notice we may have to break our camp.
So keep wisdom's lamp ever burning.
Where is your fare for the homeward journey ?
Your feet on earth, your heart in Heaven,
Like one conscious of the silent call,
Spend this short sojourn,
And in quest of self, burn like a candle.



Death

O Death, twin sister of Life !

Man paints thy figure in hideous fashion,
And stands frightened at his own creation !

Time and superstition as warp and weft,
He wove a mythic web of belief
With the shuttle of his mind.

Lo ! the weaver is caught in his own meshes ;
For him, alas ! there is no relief.

He says, cold pallor freezes thy brows,
And ghastly opacity screens thine eyes.

Thou playest hide-and-seek with him,
And eludest his trembling grasp.

Thou wanderest, wrapt in Puranic robes
Which his primitive fancy provided for thy disguise,
And while he shudders at thy footfalls,
Thou laughest at his folly in thy sleeve.

Sebash ! my queen, Sebasth !

Come, let us be friends, no more tricks ;
Enough of masquerading in thy spectral veil !
Now I tear asunder thy pallid guise.

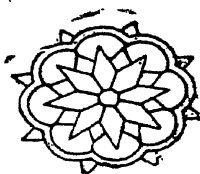
O ! thy veil, what an unworldly face it hides !
Thou canst make the greatest poet
A bankrupt of his sublime art !
But in the peasant's humble poetry
Thou art beauty's charm !
Like a just-blossoming water-lily pair
Floating on the bosom of the magic lake,
Thy half-opening eyes
Swim in beauty's fountain cup !
Thy cheeks are of blushing rose ;
Thy lucious lips are of coral made,
Softened into a grape by the maddening wine.
O thou art the Spring's golden dawn !
A crown of living diamonds
Sheds glow-worm lustre on thy brows.
O my bride !
Countless times have we walked hand in hand
In thy mysterious marble halls ;
Every night I feel thy silent kiss
In deep slumber.
Oh ! thou art Nature's ferry-maid
To row us mortals over the stream of life
To the other shore of the Hopeful-Beyond.
O Death of Puranic mythology, thou art dead !
O Deep hidden Mystery, thou art solved.

(— 3 —)

Daughter of the woods

“ O daughter of the woods !
I snatched the ball of victory
From many a valiant foe,
And smiled on whispering Death
On the blood-swampy battle-fields.
At no time did an enemy's arrow
Pierce my armoured breast.
But now, oh ! bewitching glances
Darting from thine eyes, collyrium-touched,
Like Kama's invisible shafts
Rend my heart in twain.
The wound is past cure !
Oh ! I never bow my royal head,
No not even to God !
But kings at my palace gate
Shoulder each other in haste
To solicit favours with priceless gifts,
O lovely maiden ! I place at thy feet
The empire I rule, the peerless offering.
The golden wealth I plundered

From conquered kings and capitals
Fill a thousand well-guarded treasuries.
There they lie to be lavished by thy hand.
Oh ! wilt thou be my queen.
To rule me and my lands
Girdled by the foaming seas ?
O proud lover ! who ever thou be,
King or peasant, speak not of thy prowess,
And thy fabulous plundered wealth.
Of what use are thy guarded treasures to us
Who abide beneath the shades of forest bowers,
Passing the days in peace and contentment ?
O king ! if thou lovest me at all,
Come not with blood-stained gold,
Come not with the crown on thy brow;
But thou shall be welcome when thou comest
Like a lonely guest, thou and thy heart



The Poet's Ambition

On yon eliffs, clad in the evening gold,
A pretty cloud-infant plays
O Lord ! why didst thou not make me
Such a pretty cloud-infant ?
Glittering in the morning sunshine,
Dew-Jewels drop from the Petals
Of the newly blossomed flowers.
O lord ! why didst thou not make me
Such a glittering dew-jewel ?
A mount in rivulet from the rocky heights
Races along her pebble-path,
Spraying pearls as she flows,
And singing the secrets of Nature's heart.
O Lord ! why didst thou not make me
Such a mountain rivulet ?
The blue water-lily form her day-dreams
Awakes, and breaks in to merry laughter
In the loving embrace of the autumn moon.
O Lord ! why didst thou not make me
Such a blue water-lily ?
Beneath the canopy of the twilight sky,
When the Poet communes with his soul,
Little stars twinkle in radiant glee.
O Lord ! why didst thou not make me
Such a twinkling little star ?



My Boat And I

I have a boat, and a helm to guide it

It floats on the ocean of eternity.

I fill the boat with life's rarest gifts,

And steer from shore to shore.

I touch at unknown strands

And see the strangest countries

At every lighthouse I replenish my lamp.

On every island I pitch my holiday camp.

When the tempest stirs the sea.

And breakers swell in violent rage,

My boat rocks on the tide,

And flutters on the brink of destruction,

But I calmly handle the rudder

And pass beyond the stormy zone.

When the clouds darken the winter nights,

The lighting search-lights clear my way.

So, I steer my boat from shore to shore,

And reach the horizon of the Golden Dawn.

Lo ! my boat and I melt into its divine light !



Valmeeki

O Valmeeki, king of poets !

Who art thou, perching on the bough of poetry

As a koil, warbling a celestial note ?

What soil is hallowed by thy birth ?

Who is the worthy mother

Whose breasts suckled the peerless minstrel of the age?

O poet of eternity !

Where doth thy life's history lie hidden ?

Is it slumbering in the womb of Mandakini ?

Is it resonant in the abysmal void of the Himalayan
caves,

Or hath it merged into insignificance

Before the sky-reaching grandeur

Of thine own poetic creation ?

O divine poet !

Though centuries have passed into oblivion

Since thou didst first play on thy veena

Beneath the shady Himalayan groves,

Thine immortal song is yet echoed

In all climes.

The golden dreams, the sublime visions,
That thou hast woven from the rosy beams
Of imagination as warp and weft.
Hold the people in bewitchment.
The moment thou touchest it,
Even the dead clay breathes into life
And stands as sculptured marble.
Where hast thou learnt this magic of art ?
Thou didst plunder Nature's mines
And unearthed many a valuable gem.
The stars that spangle the heavens
And the priceless pearls that are treasured
In the ocean's fathomless depth
Cannot equal the fabulous wealth
Of thine ethereal imagination.
Thy gems adorn the crown
Of the world's song.
O sun of the poetic firmament !
The poet-crescents feed on thy light,
And wax into full moons.
Goddess Vani broke her veena strings
In attuning them to thine inimitable melodies.

Beholding thy creations,
Brahma bends his head in shame.
O thou hast created
The grand ideal of Hindu society.
The epic Ramayan is the perennial stream
Flowing from Nandan Kanan
Of thy supreme vision.
From the time gone by,
The swelling Hindu Nation
Revives its inner life,
Drinking deep at thy fountain.
O National poet,
With a thousand *Namaskarams* I take
The dust of thy feet on my head.
As a man standing
Under the infinite starry heaven
Thinks of his insignificance,
I, standing in thy presence,
Confess with pride my own frailty.



Grass

O my way side grass,
With what luxury and tender freshness
You grow softened by the recent rain !
In God's eye you have a place, as in mine,
Who knows that I was not you many lives ago !
Who knows that you will not be I many lives hence !
Ah ! you whisper, you flutter;
The soul in you struggles for expression.
My heart, in spite of me, responds to your joy.
I feel we are one behind the veil !



A Cloudy Day

When the rain-clouds gather thick in the sky,
When the dark shadows hover over the earth,
When the green fields look like dusky velvet,
And when the daylight freezes into grey dimness,
I behold a different world- a world of dreams
and poems ?



A Vision of the Future

Mother twilight lingered yet on earth
Affectionately brooding over the fields;
The skirts of her golden mantle
Were clutched at by the infant corn-stalks.
Enchanted by that sublime vision
I could no longer stay at home,
And walked to the outskirts of the village,
The rice fields swelled in to golden waves.
Music and colour fused into one
And became an object of some unknown sense,
Entranced on the spot, I enjoyed the scene,
In silent amazement.
Then the colour quitted the earth;
Nature wore a star-embroidered veil
Of dusky silk.
The wind did not hiss; leaves did not flutter.
As babies on their mother's bosom
Who play and lie in innocent calm
The ripples slept on the voiceless lake.

Half awake and half in dream

I was imagining.

My mind penetrated in to the misty future

And there saw a vision !

Was it a dream ? Neither.

It dawned on my sight like magic.

If that were real, wonderful !

If that were a dream, joyful !

Under a thatched pandal, in a mango garden,

A popular assembly holds a conference.

Chains of lotus lilies swing in the air.

All is beauty and perfume.

The Emperor descends from his royal throne,

And sits on the grass with the plebeian folk.

The idle soldier, with a rusty heavily-hanging sword,

Squats in broken pomp,

And ruminates over his past conquests.

With the dusty stains of his profession on his clothes,

The peasant mingles with the royal suite and gossips.

The daily labourer who lives by the sweat of his brow;

Enjoys the same respect as his master.

Hindus Buddhists, jains, Sikhs, Parsees, Christians,
Muhammadans.

And members of all nations move in harmony
As children of a common mother.

The discord of profession and caste has vanished;
Mutual concord sweetens their life

The Angel of Dharma passes the cup of peace
Among the Assembly of Nations.

The narrow barriers dwindle in to dust.

The world blooms in to a great joint family
Heaven on earth is established.

The beams of renaissance kindle the torches of new life
And the earth is transformed in to a bridal pavilion
of Humanity.

Then suddenly my mind like a bird
Alighted among the naked realities;

Alas ! the palmyras

Like coal pillars

Forced themselves upon my earthly sight.

I was enwrapped in darkness.



A Caged Bird

I feel like a caged bird,

Not once or twice, but often in solitude.

I feel I am the soul, my body the iron cage.

I glimpse the blue expanse, and flutter my wings

To unravel the mystery of the distant stars.

I try to fly, but lo ! the iron walls

Mercilessly bar my onward flight.

Vainly I beat my wings in wounded joy.

I sit calm, fettered in golden chains,

Knowing the outward through the coloured glass
windows.

I live unto their reality, and forget

My wings and the infinite sky.

I am tired of the monotony of coloured scenes,

And wearied with the sweet slavery of enchained life.

How I wish to escape into fresh air and freedom !

But my cage repeats the same song

That I am a life-long captive !

.....

Mother's Temple

*Pilgrims to the Mother's temple encamp for the night
on a mountainous plateau, and awaken early the
next morning. The temple is seen in the
distance.*

First pilgrim

Like a new bride from her bedroom window,
The day peeps through the misty curtains,
From the eastern brink of the earth.

Second pilgrim

The fragrance of the blowing flowers,
The charming beauty of the mountain scenes,
And the blitheful songs of the morning birds,
Make us all dance with joy !

[Third pilgrim

Hush ! ye pilgrims, and hear
The auspicious benedictions of the priests.
The sounds of the golden gongs,
The sonorous noise of the sacred conch,
And the rhythmic melody of the Vedic chants
Reach us ; it is time to depart.

Fourth pilgrim

Behold yonder, friends,
On the top of that green mountain,
Mother's temple shining like a jewelled crown.
Let us gather flowers for worship, and begone.
The grassy path which leads thither
Sleeps under the shady trees.
The drooping flowers cover the earth
As if strewn with gems and rubies.
Hasten, pilgrims ! Ere noon
We must reach the golden shrine.

Voice of the sky

Ho ! stop, my sons, stop !
You rush like children, and know not the truth.
You think the way is strewn with flowers,
And that trees defend the earth against the scorching
sun.
Banish such luxuriant dreams.
Sons, this is no playground for children.
Not every one who counts a rosary bead
Is a faithful devotee of God.

The baser metals are consumed in fire,
While the pure gold comes out unscathed,
Idle gossipers, lip-patriots and beguilers,
Coxcombs and chicken-hearted cowards
Cannot reach the goal ; they return
From the half-way house frightened and bewildered
By the shadows of suffering and death.
This is the road for ever hallowed
By the footsteps of the world's Prophets ;
This is the road ever made sacred
By the relics of the greatest patriots ;
This is the dangerous path often washed
By the blood of the holy Martyrs.
Oh ! return ! This is not for luxury hunters.

*Then a skull which is lying in the roadside dust speaks
to the pilgrims.*

Skull

Our years have passed. We have lain here
Worm-eaten and dust-mouldered.
Wherever the earth covers our bones,
On every piece a creeper springs,
And the sweetest flowers bloom.
Whoever tastes the flower's honey

Holds in his hand the key of Nature.
When once is birth, death is certain ;
But both are the same in the hero's eyes.
He who stands at the Mother's altar
As a lamb bowing ready for sacrifice,
Is Fortune's dearest child.
On him shower the benediction of the Gods ;
The dust of his feet crowns the people's heads.
His crystal tears of silent joy.
Like pearls of countless price,
Shall be treasured in Heaven's jewel-boxes.
Apsarasas weave his glorious name
Into the wreaths of their songs.
If there is such a hero in your midst ?
O pilgrims ! let him come forward.

*The pilgrims look bewildered into each other's
faces, and take to their heels. Some in their
anxiety to run away tumble over a steep
precipice. All of them vanish except
one youth, who, with folded hands,
and tears of joy running down
his cheeks, speaks to the
skull in a tremulous
voice*

Last pilgrim

This vast Universe is my sporting field;
And the planets are my resting places.
My body is my football ;
I kick it up and down.
If the seed does not break its shell,
How can the green plant spring into life ?
If the wick does not burn,
Can there be light to dispel gloom ?
Sacrifice is the source of greater life ;
That is my ideal my life's flaming song.
Pain and suffering are my kith and kin.
Poverty is my hereditary right.
Helping the world is my Duty's call.
Now on the chariot of independence,
I am ready to run my race ;
Victory and defeat hang on the whim of Fate ;
But the trial is left to human choice.
Can these mountains bar my way
When the all-powerful Mother sways my destiny ?
Oh ! if I should die in the mid-way,
Like you I shall lay my bones on earth,
And play time through with the dancing stars.

Skull

My son, your aspiration is noble and fair.
You are the true martyr. The wreath of sacrifice
Waits for your radiant brow.
At the Mother's holy shrine
Burn thou like a camphor ball !
Time is precious ; move, my boy !
And impress the sands of eternity
With thy feet, as the bearer of the cross.



The Warring Nations and the League of Poets

O, ye warring Nations of the world,
Slaves of power, lust, and greed!
Wherefore with wolfish appetite
Do you spill your neighbour's blood ?
White or Black, Yellow or Brown,
Are not they your own kith and kin ?
Tear asunder all that the passions weave,
Pride, nationality, language, colour, and all !
Is not what remains, the common soul ?
O unchristian races !
Traders in human blood !
Intoxicated with the wine of glory !
Why recrucify jesus divine
On the cross of your factory's chimney
You try to build pyramids of gold
On the skeletons of rustic nations.
Their dying sighs like howling winds
Fan the flames of your brooding doom.

You produce more than you consume,
And enslave the weak to sell your goods !
O civilization, the handiwork of Goddess Capital !
If this is your inner mission,
Spread not your gloomy wings over the earth,
And breed not green-eyed reptiles
To poison the heart of Humanity
O commerce, winged enchantress !
You enchain the hungry Nations
To your golden sandals,
And drag them over hill and dale,
Sea and sky,
Till they to the dust return.
Militarism, which followed on your heels,
Now stands a wreck of her own diabolical crime,
Quenching the fire of the ravenous passions
With tears of repentance.
Of what avail the league of Nations
Who fight over the lion's share
Of the spoils of the vanquished foes ?
With so much burning lava in their hearts
Can they bestow cool peace on earth ?

O political conclave,
Time shall unglove your lionish paws
That the world may behold your blood-stained claws.
O International League of poets !
I cherish thee in my heart's inmost shrine;
Asleep or awake thou hauntest my vision.
Oh ! shalt thou ever bloom into reality
To save the earth from the grip of future wars ?
O poets of all climes and countries,
Harbingers of universal peace,
Devotees who burn incense at the altar of Humanity
Light your torches in the flame of Heavenly wisdom;
Unfurl your banners and on them print in gold:
 Love, not Hatred;
 Freedom, not Slavery;
 Humanity, not Mammon;
 Equality, not Birthright;
 Co-operation, not competition;
And run a crusade against the Devil in man.
Proclaim from the housetops
The dawn of the spiritual era,
And toll the death-knell
Of the selfish greed of Nations.
Hark ! the divine call ! Awake, arise, answer !



Notes

PAGE

1. "O COWHERD PRINCE." This is one aspect of the many-sided life of SRI KRISHNA, the Hindu God of Love.
2. The Veena is the typical Stringed instrument of India.
5. A Sannyasin is a follower of the religious life; but there are Sannyasins and sannnyasins, as there is religion and religion.
12. Apsarasas are celestial dance Maidens.
14. Radha is beloved of Sri Krishna. She stands for the human Soul.
17. The Gopees are girl companions of the young Sri Krishna. They are the virtues and faculties of the human Soul, of which Radha is the chief or Synthesis.
25. Dharma is universal law, which to the individual become duty.
30. Puranic robes are the weaving of the Indian mediaeval Scriptures.
30. Sebash! an exclamation of approval such as "Good"
38. Namaskarams—Salutations.

Duvvuru Rami Reddy
Vignana Samithi—NELLORE

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